

VETERANS BENEFITS AWARENESS TASK FORCE
VETERAN SERVICE OFFICER MEETING
Friday, March 22, 2002— 10:00 AM
State Veterans Home St. Louis, Missouri

In attendance: **John Robinson**, Chief of Staff, Lt. Governor's Office; **Jill Talken**, Executive Secretary, Missouri Veterans Commission; **Sam McVay**, Executive Director, Missouri Veterans Commission; **Hal Dulle**, Assistant to the Director, Missouri Veterans Commission; **Ralph Durnbaugh**, Director Veterans Benefit Awareness, Missouri Veterans Commission; **Carl Niewoehner**, Chairman, Missouri Veterans Commission; **Joseph Frank**, Commissioner Missouri Veterans Commission; **Joseph Mossey**, Lt. Governor's Office; **Carl Hargus**, **Jerilyn Cornelius**, **John Ames**, **Raymond Aubuchon**, **James Baughn**, **Valerie Branch**, **Al Bridgeman**, **Richard Davis**, **Kenneth Gore**, **Robert Harvey**, **Gerald Hodge**, **Jim Hurst**, **Sharon Keith**, **Helen Kneir**, **Dan McFarland**, **Bill Palmer**, **Jerald Parker**, **Shirley Ryker**, **Bob Schweitzer**, **Gersene Jones**, **Lawrence Wilson**, Veterans Service Officers, Missouri Veterans Commission; **Jerry Quigley**, Director Jacksonville Cemetery, Missouri Veterans Commission; **John Eckhoff**, Veterans Service Manager St. Louis County Dept. of Human Services; **Everett Kelly**, Military Order of Purple Heart; **Fred Bradley**, PVA; **Mike Eppler**, PVA; **Ken Corder**, DAV; **Mel King**, American Legion; **Harrison Ochs**, American Legion; **Larry Endicott**, DAV; **Jerry Lorang**, VA Regional Office

- I. **Opening Remarks** – Sam McVay, Executive Director thanked everyone for coming and opened the meeting by introducing all attendees. Sam explained to the attendees the Veterans Benefit Task Force purpose and direction. After reviewing VA statistics the Commission realized that Missouri is ranked 44th in compensation benefits and 22nd in pension benefits. First we must educate the legislature, secondly we need to work more with the Veteran Service Organizations as a team. A Veteran Service Grant Program was established by legislature last year that will help with allowing matching grants that should help in working together with the Veterans Service Organizations. During a joint committee meeting on Veterans Affairs, Lt. Governor Maxwell offered assistance and committed to the Veterans Commission in joining efforts to raise veteran benefits awareness. A task force was appointed and met in November and organized four task groups: one group to develop a message, second group to design a plan in delivering the message, third group to plan a response to application, and the fourth group will work on raising funds.
- II. **Task Force Mission** – John Robinson, Lt. Governor Chief of Staff, explained to the attendees the Lt. Governor Maxwell's support in the Veterans Benefits Awareness Task Force. His office plans to help the Service to Veteran Officers in accomplishing a successful program. We are in a fiscal crises in Jefferson City right now but we want to get the word out, are you a Veteran? And if you are you may qualify for benefits. Media response has been great on Veteran issues. Veterans Supermarkets will help in increasing the number of applications. Senior Rx Program packets will be sent out to all officers.
- III. **Carl Niewoehner** Chairman, Missouri Veterans Commission. Mr. Niewoehner expressed the need to join efforts with veteran organizations and VA. The Veteran Service Matching Grant Program will help to team up with service organizations. The task force is working to get the word out and the Commission supports the officers and they want to be kept updated on any concerns the officers may have. Feasibility study bill in the legislature is designed to add additional veterans' cemeteries in Missouri.
- IV. **Update-** Sam McVay
 - a.) The task force is looking for resources for money to help pay for paid ads to help on promotional items to increase awareness. Task force is working at putting together a package to help with advertising. We need Veteran Service Officers to help identify

key people and areas that we need to try and reach. We will meet with the legislators to explain what the task force is doing.

- b.) Do cooperative efforts with the Senior Rx Program.
- c.) The task force will be conducting Veteran Benefits Supermarkets throughout the state. Supermarkets have been used in other states and proven to be successful. The task force will try to have 10 Supermarkets within the next year. Commitment already for 3 in St. Louis are and some out state. Community involvement is needed.
- d.) Looking at toll free number and voice activated call forward system to handle increase in phone calls.
- e.) The Commission is developing a Foundation for large sums of money donated from corporations to help fund program.
- f.) Sam expressed his concerns on officers salaries and will continue to request from the legislature to increase pay. Sam will be meeting with Office of Administration to evaluate salaries.
- g.) Web page design to assist veterans with questions.

V. John Eckhoff Veterans Service Manager St. Louis County Dept. of Human Services, advised that the Veterans Supermarkets will provide medical testing, veterans assistance and people to assist with employment issues. This will be combined effort with other agencies getting those involved with Senior Rx Program, elderly advocacy and military branches such as recruiters and advisors. Plans to target at least 500 veterans at each venue. The first three will be held in St. Louis area.

VI. Joseph Frank Commissioner Missouri Veterans Commission, thanked the Lt. Governor's support to the veterans. Service Officers help is needed to get money into Missouri where it was earned.

VII. Jerry Lorang VA Regional Office, explained the reason that the VA could no longer serve on the task force, however they intend to support the efforts of the task force. They will continue to improve their processing of benefits. Service Officers have now had Trip Training which will help the VA in processing case perfected claims as soon as they are received. VA is also working to reduce the backlog of claims.

VIII. Hal Dulle Assistant to the Director, Missouri Veterans Commission gave a status update on the World War II Medal Recognition Program and other commemorative medals programs.

IX. Questions & Concerns

Newsletters will go to Service to Veteran Officers updating on the Veteran Benefit Task Force projects.

District meetings newsletters to go out to veterans and wives of veterans promoting benefits awareness.

Organizations need to work together to get funds donated.

Advertising is important and we must get the media involved with the project.

Retirees and wives of retirees are required by VA to have ID cards. Can MO National Guard and Armories help to assist with making replacement ID badges?

May 18 is Armed Forces Day, contact MO National Guard about getting medals for areas around the Veterans Homes and have a presentation ceremony at the Homes.

It is important to partnership with other agencies in sharing data.